

White Paper Report

Report ID: 105670

Application Number: ME-50010-12

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Institution: Community College Humanities Association

Reporting Period: 2/1/2012-6/30/2014

Report Due: 6/30/2014

Date Submitted: 1/23/2015

**ADVANCING THE HUMANITIES THROUGH
BRIDGING CULTURES PROGRAMS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES
COMMUNITY COLLEGE HUMANITIES ASSOCIATION**

White Paper
ME50001012

The Community College Humanities Association (CCHA), with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) conducted a two year project that began in February, 2012. Its purposes was to strengthen existing introductory courses or create new courses based on the Bridging Cultures themes, to advance cultural and civic understanding in humanities courses, to encourage individual scholarship – in short, to support curriculum and faculty development to advance the humanities at community colleges through a nationwide, multi-disciplinary project.

The project was part of the NEH Bridging Cultures initiative to enhance understanding of diverse countries, peoples, as well as cultural and intellectual traditions worldwide. The challenge for CCHA was to equip community college faculty and their colleges to develop courses, modules and programs on cultural and civic -- that is, “bridging cultures” -- themes. Noted humanities scholars and experienced community college faculty mentors provided guidance to the competitively selected college teams. . The projects they developed were designed to be replicable by community colleges nationally.

A Competitive Application Process

A Call for Proposals was distributed on line and via regular mail to all college presidents, humanities deans and CCHA members. From the 76 proposals received, a Selection Committee composed of community college leaders (including college presidents) chose eighteen colleges to participate in the project, receiving faculty and curriculum development services and a host of supportive resources. The eighteen selected community colleges were:

- Black River Technical College, Arkansas
- Community College of Baltimore County, Maryland
- Delaware County Community College, Pennsylvania
- Georgia Perimeter College, Georgia
- Heartland Community College, Illinois
- Hopkinsville Community College, Kentucky
- Kanawha Valley Community and Technical College, West Virginia

- Kirkwood Community College, Iowa
- New Hampshire Technical Institute, New Hampshire
- Peninsula College, Washington
- Phillips Community College, Arkansas
- Pierpont Community College, West Virginia
- San Antonio College, Texas
- St. Louis Community College, Missouri
- South Piedmont Community College, North Carolina
- Tarrant County College, SE Campus, Texas
- Trident Technical College, South Carolina

These community colleges choose to work in one of the following five humanities disciplines: Literature, History, Philosophy, Religion and Civic Engagement. A requirement was that a three-member team from each college, two humanities faculty and one administrator, would develop their chosen project throughout the project period. Each college prepared an action plan to guide the teams work.

Mentors and Scholars

Each college was assigned a mentor with experience and expertise in the chosen area. The mentors were:

- Kathy Fedorko, CCHA Fellow and Professor of English Emerita, Middlesex County College, New Jersey
- Jeffrey Clausen, CCHA Fellow and Instructor of Philosophy, Green River Community College, Washington
- Maureen Nutting, CCHA Fellow and Professor of History, North Seattle Community College, Washington
- Emily Tai, CCHA Fellow and Professor of History, Queensborough Community College, New York
- Virginia York, CCHA Fellow, Professor of History, Gulf Coast State College, Florida

(A detailed description of the functions performed by the mentors and their significant value to the project's success can be found in the project monograph submitted under separate cover.)

Three nationally recognized scholars with expertise in building cultural understanding spoke at two national conferences, and were available to assist throughout the project period. They were:

- James Voll, Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic History, Georgetown University, District of Columbia
- Clement Price, Professor of History and the African Diaspora, Rutgers University, New Jersey
- Lyn Di Ioria, Assistant Professor of Caribbean and U.S. Latino/a Literature at City College of New York and CUNY Graduate School

Guidelines for Mentors

A guidebook to prepare the mentors for their roles was prepared and used as the curriculum for a mentor orientation session that was held prior to the first national conference. (A copy is submitted under separate cover.) It sets out the mentors responsibilities including their roles at the two national conferences and their work with their assigned teams throughout the project.

National Conference I

The first of two national conferences was held September 26-29, 2012 in Arlington Virginia. Its purpose was to enable the eighteen three member teams to meet intensively with their assigned mentors for the first time. Their task was to refine the action plans submitted in their applications, and determine a precise step-by-step procedure for moving forward. The conference was a mix of mentor-team meetings, presentations by the three project scholars and by each of the mentors in their area of expertise. (A copy of the Program Book for National Conference I is submitted under separate cover.)

National Conference II

The second national conference was held December 5-7, 2013, also in Arlington, Virginia. Its purpose was to share the progress made by the teams in developing and incorporating new programs, new or revised courses or modules. Their presentations were made in a panel format, each moderated by the mentor they had worked with throughout the project. The titles of the panels were:

- “Bridging Cultures, Bridging Histories, Bridging Communities: Strategies and Resources”
Moderator: Maureen Nutting, mentor
- “Bridging Cultures in the Study of Religion”
Moderator: Emily Tai, mentor
- “Bridging Cultures Through Civic Engagement”
Moderator, Virginia York, mentor
- “Bridging Cultures Through the Study of Philosophy”
Moderator: Jeffrey Clausen, mentor
- “Bridging Cultures Through Literature”

Moderator: Kathy Fedorko, mentor

The agenda also included a special presentation by John O. Voll, Professor of History, Georgetown University, with a second presentation by Andrew Rusnak, Community College of Baltimore, MD, and Bob Sessions, Kirkwood Community College, IA on "Science and Technology Across Cultures."

The conference agenda also provided time for the team members to meet with their mentors to fine tune the case studies they were preparing for the project monograph.

Site Visits

A critically important component of this project was the mentor site visits. At an appropriate time, determined collaboratively by the teams and their mentors, each team received a site visit from their mentor. These site visits contributed significantly to the progress of the new initiatives being developed at each participating college. In addition to meeting with their teams, the mentors met with key college administrators (typically the college president as well) and faculty. Their goals were to build a responsive campus environment for the new programs, courses and modules being developed and to provide mid-course corrections to the faculty and curriculum development plans of the teams. The mentors also observed classes where the new materials were being piloted.

Outreach

The project, featuring three of the college teams, was presented at Forums at the American Association of Community Colleges Conventions in 2013 and 2014 and at concurrent sessions of the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, also in 2013 and 2014.

Project Monograph

A major goal of this initiative was to showcase the eighteen projects that could be readily accessible for replication by the nation's community colleges. To that end, each college team prepared a case study delineating the many steps involved in preparing their projects. The case studies also included recommended readings for students with a separate section of recommendations for humanities faculty. The case studies were compiled and published as a monograph entitled "Advancing the Humanities through Bridging Cultures Programs at Community Colleges". (A copy of the monograph is being submitted under separate cover.) Copies of the monograph were mailed to all community college presidents, humanities deans and CCHA's membership. It is also available on-line in a section of the CCHA website dedicated to this project.

Lessons Learned

This was a very successful project. The Bridging Cultures themes provided the ideal framework for individual scholarship and the action plans of the participating college teams. The focus on collegial teamwork, involving students in scholarship using primary sources, and using cultural diversity found in the students' classrooms and communities to make "bridging cultures" real suggested striking ways to enhance teaching and learning far beyond the boundaries of the grant project.

Most the participating faculty worked diligently and with great effort and creativity. Taking on the action plan project meant significantly more time and effort than initially thought – although with immense rewards since the project required real change and growth as scholars and teachers. Clearly the professional renewal brought by the relevance and impetus of the project was the most significant result and the central cause of the success of each team's program.

The project co-directors had extensive previous experience with major curriculum and faculty development projects and their expertise contributed, as the Outside Evaluator noted, to a project whereby "the structure and implementation of this grant was nearly flawless. It was well conceived, doable in the designated timeframe, well monitored, and communication between the project administrators, mentors and their teams was excellent." It should be noted even the weaker teams gained from the experience of the project and there was evidence that their students were and will be well served by the changes the team made.

The project was a tremendous boon to humanities teachers participating as part of the college teams. Community college faculty tend to be isolated – by geography, too-busy schedules, disconnects from professional colleagues, and self and public perceptions of their status. This project was a tremendous boost to the self perceptions, research time, connections with colleagues, and learning of the participating faculty members. Many participants discovered the importance of using primary sources through this project. Too often it is a default position on the part of administrators and faculty to use textbooks that pre-digest difficult and complex primary materials. The directive to use primary sources provided a corrective to the excessive reliance on textbooks and, instead, encouraged faculty participants to use rich and robust primary sources. Some faculty were surprised that in going beyond textbooks they not only did not lose students but students responded with enthusiasm and were able to handle longer and more sophisticated material. Most were delighted at the prospect of broadening their textual offerings.

The roles of the administrators typically ensured the ongoing college support for the faculty members and, in many cases, helped to smooth the process of approval and implementation of

new courses and programs. Several administrators thought the project should be repeated so that additional strengthening of the humanities could take place and so that new college teams could be added. The project mentors reported that the faculty team members tended to be campus leaders so that their roles also facilitated successful implementation of course modules, new courses and programs serving the student population and the community at large. Some mentors reported that their own scholarship was enhanced as a result of research to help the teams with course materials, new scholarship in the disciplines, and ideas for implementation. In future projects more attention will need to be placed on the teaching of distance education courses.

Most of the faculty participants stressed how valuable the project was for their teaching and scholarship. For many, it provided one of the few opportunities they had to engage in serious scholarship, and many noted how the grant and collaborative process changed their teaching in ways especially appropriate for bridging cultures. Some faculty re-discovered the power of humanities to humanize students, to help them become more thoughtful, better listeners, more open, less cynical and more skeptical. Many thought that these lessons were especially prevalent because of the cross cultural nature of their new courses and modules.

In Conclusion . . .

The many faceted accomplishments of the eighteen participating colleges are described in detail in the project monograph. It is clear from their case study reports that the faculty and administrators who participated in this project continue to be enthusiastic and committed to strengthening cultural understanding among their students, the college community and the communities served by the college. Their optimism and their sense of the possible suggest that the initiatives begun in this project are likely to carry into the future not only at the participating colleges but at other colleges across the country.

CCHA is deeply appreciative of this opportunity provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities to enhance humanities education at community colleges.